TUCSON PLANT MATERIAL CENTER
3241 North Romero Road
Tucson
Pima County
Arizona

HABS NO. AZ-159

HABS
ARIZ,
10-TUCSO,
32-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HABS
ARIZ,
10-TUCSO,
32-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TUCSON PLANT MATERIALS CENTER

HABS AZ-159

Location: 3241 North Romero Road, Tucson, Arizona Pima County, Arizona

USGS Jaynes Quadrangle (7'5),
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

Z	E	N
12	499640	3569760

Present Owner: United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service

Present Use: Facility for testing and evaluating native plants.

Significance: The PMC is significant for its association with the initial construction and development of the first soil conservation nursery established in Arizona by SGS. The Tucson Nursery represents one of the first group of 48 SCS nurseries built by SGS from 1935 through June 1936 with labor provided by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Pueblo Revival adobe architecture developed into common usage in Arizona and New Mexico during the 1920's and 1930's. The Tucson PMC is operated for the purpose of research, development, propagation and release of beneficial plant species.

Part I. Descriptive Information

A. Physical Context of Site

The Tucson Plant Materials Center is a 45.9 acre tract of land located in north Tucson within the SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Section 27, T13S, R13E (U.S.G.S. Jaynes, Arizona). The site is triangular in shape with the apex of the triangle at the southeast quarter corner of Section 27. The Machinery Shed is located within the Tucson Plant Materials Center building complex which is situated in the southern most 18.1 acres of the site, at the apex of the triangle. The remaining area of the site is developed as horticultural and agricultural fields.

The west leg of the triangular shaped site boundary extends northwesterly along the east side of the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The east leg of the triangle extends north along the west side of Romero Road. The north boundary extends east - west along West Prince Road.

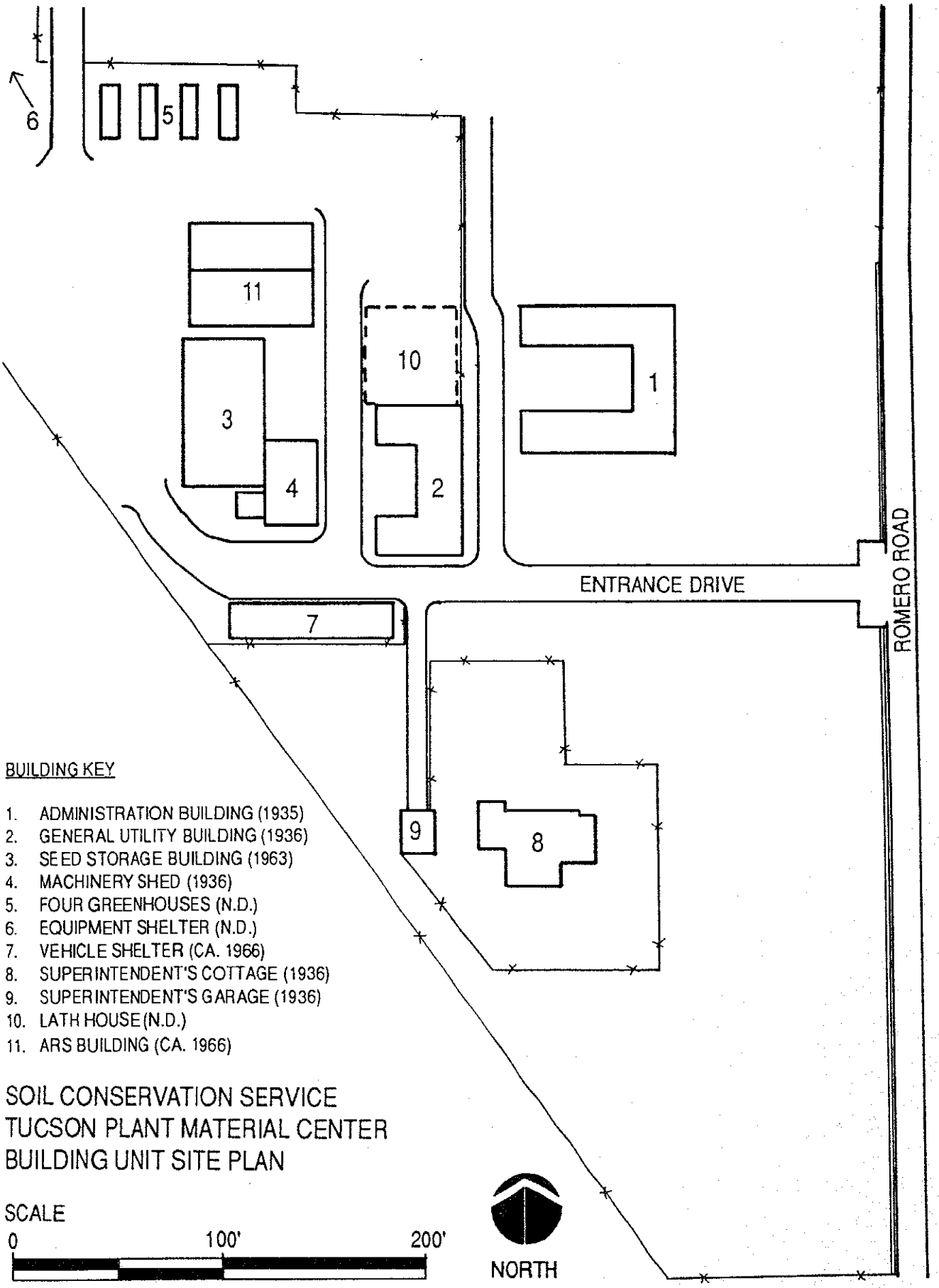
The area surrounding the site in north Tucson is presently characterized by medium density housing subdivisions and trailer parks to the north, east, and southeast. The area to the west and southwest of the site, located between the railroad right-of-way and U.S. Interstate 10, is predominantly undeveloped. At the time the site was initially constructed, the surrounding area was rural in character, developed as agricultural land with irrigation supplied by the Flowing Well Irrigation District.

The Machinery Shed is located within the closely grouped building complex at the south end of the site. It is one of five extant historic buildings in the complex which includes a total of 14 structures. In addition to the Machinery Shed, the other historic buildings include the Administration Building (1935), the General Utility Building (1936), the Superintendent's Cottage (1936), and the Superintendent's Garage (ca. 1938 to 1941). The other buildings include four greenhouses built by 1964, a Lath House, the Seed Building (1963), two equipment or vehicle shelters, and the Agricultural Research Services Building (ARS) (ca. 1966).

The building complex is accessed by an unpaved driveway which extends west from Romero Road approximately 175 feet to the complex. With the exception of the Superintendent's Cottage and Garage, all of the buildings are located north of the entrance drive. The Administration Building and the General Utility Building are two largest of the historic buildings, containing 3076 square feet and 2084 square feet respectively. The "U" shaped Administration Building faces east toward Romero Road. The General Utility Building is also a "U" shaped structure and is located approximately 25 feet southwest of the Administration Building. Attached to the north wall of the Utility Building is the 50 foot by 50 foot Lath House. The Machinery Shed is situated 25 feet west of the Utility Building with its east - west axis in line with that of the Utility Building. Abutting the Machinery Shed to its west is the Seed Building. It is a 40 foot by 80 foot metal building approximately 30 feet in height. A steel frame, metal roofed vehicle parking shed, built ca. 1966, is located 40 feet south of the Machinery Shed. The 50 foot by 60 foot metal ARS Building is located immediately north

of the Seed Building. Four Greenhouses, each measuring approximately 10 feet by 25 feet, are situated 100 feet north of the Seed Building. Fifty feet northwest of the Greenhouses is a 75 foot long by 25 feet wide metal frame equipment shelter.

The current physical character of the site is dominated by the stuccoed adobe Pueblo Revival style historic buildings and the mature landscaping of trees, palms, and shrubs surrounding the complex. Most of the extant landscaping was begun in 1936 and in place by 1941. Historic mature Elm trees are located along both sides of the entrance drive. Other trees such as Aleppo Pines, Canary Island Pines, Chilean Mesquite, Eucalyptus, and Chinaberry are located around the Administration Building and the Superintendent's Cottage. Two specimen Arizona Palms are located in the patio of the Administration Building. They were grown from seeds collected in Palm Canyon, Arizona, and transplanted from pots to the patio in January 1936, by Howard R. Benham.



BUILDING KEY

1. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (1935)
2. GENERAL UTILITY BUILDING (1936)
3. SEED STORAGE BUILDING (1963)
4. MACHINERY SHED (1936)
5. FOUR GREENHOUSES (N.D.)
6. EQUIPMENT SHELTER (N.D.)
7. VEHICLE SHELTER (CA. 1966)
8. SUPERINTENDENT'S COTTAGE (1936)
9. SUPERINTENDENT'S GARAGE (1936)
10. LATH HOUSE (N.D.)
11. ARS BUILDING (CA. 1966)

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
TUCSON PLANT MATERIAL CENTER
BUILDING UNIT SITE PLAN

SCALE
0 100' 200'

Part II. Historic Information

A. Historic Context

In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Federal government, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, passed a variety of legislation designed to revitalize the nation's economy. One of the most important components of the New Deal legislation was the National Industrial Recovery Act passed on June 16, 1933. One provision of the Act was the allotment of $5,000,000 to the Department of the Interior "for soil-erosion prevention works on public and private lands."

On August 25, 1933, the Soil Erosion Service (predecessor to the Soil Conservation Service) was established within the Department of Interior as a temporary organization. Operation of the Soil Erosion Service started on September 19, 1933, with Hugh H. Bennett appointed the first Director. Bennett's initial action as Director was to implement a "reconnaissance soil erosion survey" in order to get a clear idea of the extent and location of soil erosion in the United States. In March 1935, the Soil Erosion Service was transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture. With the help of extensive lobbying efforts by Bennett, Congress passed the Soil Conservation Act on April 27, 1935. The purpose of the Act was "to provide permanently for the control and prevention of soil erosion and thereby to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of reservoirs, and maintain the navigability of rivers and harbors, protect public health, public lands and relieve unemployment."

The Soil Conservation Act directed the Department of Agriculture to establish an agency to be known as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). "Although it was clearly the intent of the Act to make permanent the existing Soil Erosion Service, the change of name was a conscious effort to give the name a more positive ring and to invest the agency with a conservation charge broader than erosion control." The Act specifically included dealing with the issue of national unemployment by the use of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Hugh H. Bennett was designated Chief of the SCS.

Soon after the formation of the SCS, over 150 Civilian Conservation Corps Camps were transferred to its jurisdiction from the Forest Service. This increased work force enabled the SCS to extend its demonstration work. By June 30, 1936, the SCS had in operation 147 demonstration projects, 23 research stations, 454 CCC camps, and 48 soil conservation nurseries. One of these nurseries was located in Tucson, Arizona, and is now known as the Tucson Plant Materials Center.

The purpose of the Soil Conservation Nurseries was to propagate and study native and exotic vegetation for potential use in regional soil conservation project areas. The nurseries propagated and observed unproven species in a controlled setting. Those that proved promising for project areas were rapidly propagated to increase the species stock for further study. Those species were then tested in observational plots at branch nurseries, at field evaluation plots on federal land, or on cooperating farms or ranches. After thorough trial,

successful species were propagated for use in various regional soil conservation projects. The focus of the Tucson Nursery's work dealt "primarily with range revegetation and restoration rather than with farm erosion control."

B. Specific History of Site

The Tucson Plant Materials Center was established by the Soil Conservation Service in the summer of 1934 as the Tucson Nursery. The site consisted of seventy-eight acres of land. Eighteen acres was leased from the University of Arizona on the southern end of the University Experiment Farm located on Romero Road. The remaining 60 acres was secured from the City of Tucson through the University of Arizona. Known as the Tucson City Farm, it was located one mile west of the Romero Road site on the west bank of the Santa Cruz River. Forty acres of that site was used from 1934 through 1940 as seed production fields. After that time, the SCS utilized all of the University Experiment Farm's 28 acres of fields at the Romero Road site for that purpose, as well as for observational plantings and drought resistant studies.

The Tucson Nursery represented one of three nurseries serving the southwestern United States. The other two were located in Safford, Arizona, and Shiprock, New Mexico. Due in part to its close location to the University of Arizona, with its strong agricultural research programs, the Tucson Nursery served as the headquarters of the three nurseries. In this role, it served as the "clearing house" for all regional nursery activities. F.J. Crider was Regional Director and J.A. Downs was Superintendent of the Tucson Nursery in the mid 1930s.

Originally there were eight structures on the site. The Administration Building, which was completed by July 1935, represents the first building constructed at the site. The University of Arizona provided the majority of the funding for this building as federal funds were not yet available. The General Utility Building, the Machinery Shed, the Superintendent's Cottage, the Greenhouse, and the Lath House were completed by January 1936. However, the construction of those buildings was substantially complete by July 1935. Those buildings were constructed entirely with Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) financed labor. The architect is unknown. A CCC Building, probably used as a bunkhouse, was built in ca. 1938 and was located behind the Machinery Shed. It was demolished in April 1963 to make room for the Seed Building. The Superintendent's Garage was built between 1938 and 1941.

The original greenhouse was demolished in ca. 1966. A native specimen plant garden was installed in its location. A Lath House exists on the site west of the Administration Building. However, it is unknown whether it is the original Lath House. An adobe wall, about three feet high, was built in 1936 at the east boundary of the building complex along Romero Road. It has been demolished.

Between 1935 and 1952, the Soil Conservation Service operated the Tucson Plant Materials Center as the Tucson Nursery. In 1952 the operation of the site was transferred to the University of Arizona where in remained for ten years. In 1962 the operation of the facility was transferred back to the SCS. It appears that it was at this time that the name of the Tucson Nursery was changed to the Tucson Plant Materials Center. After taking charge of the facility, the SCS initiated a "rehabilitation" program at the site. The program, which lasted from 1963 to 1965, included several improvement projects at the site such as reroofing and repainting all of the buildings, installation of a new well and pump, construction of two steel

frame implement or vehicle shelters, and the building of four small greenhouses. Between 1965 and 1967, the Agricultural Research Service of the Department of Agriculture erected a metal building north of the Seed Building. A portion of the building was used as a growth chamber built by Dr. L. Neal Wright. The most ambitious project was the construction of the Seed Building. Completed in July 1963, it is used to process seeds grown at the Plant Materials Center. The SCS has operated the site from 1962 to the present day. The Tucson Plant Materials Center is currently one of twenty-six such facilities remaining in the United States.

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